

WORLD DOMINION

The World Dominion Movement advocates Informed Continuous Co-ordinated Evangelism to reach everyone at home and abroad. Its basis is belief in the Deity and Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the World's Only Saviour, and in the Final Authority of Holy Scripture.

Editor: THOMAS COCHRANE.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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REV. G. HART, the Home Secretary of the India North-West Mission has just returned from a visit to the stations on the field.

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Critical Days in Germany

‘ *Der Beobachter* ’

‘ THIS is the turning point,’ we all said, not without a sigh of relief, when it became known that the General Synod of the Confessional (*Bekennniskirche*) had been able to meet unhindered in Augsburg, and that the Minister for Home Affairs had sent an official observer.

We felt sure of this when news came that all clergymen had been released from the Concentration Camps, and that the Prussian High Court of Administration, acting as a Court of Appeal, had cancelled Professor Karl Barth’s dismissal. We felt rightly, it seemed to us, that, as the Minister for Home Affairs himself had publicly said, we might hope for a speedy settlement of the Church dispute. Instead of this, however, we were dismayed to learn that the ‘ Observer ’ had in his pocket a document empowering him to dissolve the Synod ; that the measures against Confessional clergymen, such as suppression of speeches, evictions and arrests, had by no means been withdrawn, and that Karl Barth, after winning his case, had been retired according to Paragraph VI of the ‘ Rule for Re-instatement in the Professional Civil Service,’ although in its actual meaning this Rule is directed only against politically objectionable officers.

We might well have spared ourselves both hope and disappointment. We learned one thing from the whole story of the Church dispute, namely, that to know only the immediate facts is to know nothing, and that it is necessary to know the underlying principles in order to form any true estimate of the situation. As soon as the full implication of events is seen one remembers not to rejoice too soon or to fear prematurely.

All who wish to form a reliable opinion on the relations between State and Church in present-day Germany must never lose sight of one dominating fact, namely, that the dispute between the State and the Evangelical Church is fundamentally a struggle between two spiritual authorities ;

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on the one hand the Nazi doctrine (*Weltanschauung*) and on the other the supremacy of the Word of God. Of course, this struggle between the world and the Word has always been present and always will be. Yet, while it is inevitable, there is no need for a Church dispute in any well ordered State. It is the peculiar feature of this dispute in Germany, however, that both authorities claim complete and unquestionable control. In other words, both demand the whole faith and the unconditional submission of the people. 'Religion' confronts Religion.

For the first time in centuries the Christian Church, as mandatory of God's Word, finds herself again opposed to organized powers which on their side regard themselves as mandatories of another totalitarian claim on the whole soul of man. It is this which has brought about an open fight. The totalitarian claim of Nazi doctrine is wielded by a party so powerful and extensive that a collision with it must mean for the Church a fight to death, at any rate so far as her organized existence is concerned.

We may well hesitate in asserting that this anti-Christian totalitarian claim coincides with the State. Yet, if we consider the German News Office's very full report of the motives which led to Professor Barth's final dismissal as the Government's last word—as it all too clearly appears to be—then the driving powers behind the unconditional totalitarian claim would certainly seem to be identical with the State. If this is really so, then its consequences are immeasurable, for this would mean that to-day in Germany we are on the eve of a disastrous struggle between the State and the two great Christian Churches of that country. Such a struggle must far surpass any previous struggle in the gravity of the principles at stake and in its inevitable ruthlessness. Yet it is difficult to believe that the Government is really prepared to plunge the whole nation into that kind of disintegrating struggle at a time when it needs, more than ever, to combine all its forces in order to carry out its extensive programme of reconstruction.

But the State, far from making possible that peace which it continually asserts it desires, continues to push

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matters to extremes. The words of the Minister of Education on the day of Professor Barth's final dismissal, 'We do not desire a struggle between State and Church,' can only mean that there will be peace when the Church unconditionally submits to the State. The State seems incapable of realizing that the Church can never submit herself in her spiritual affairs to its dictation, and that, by its action, it is precipitating an inevitable conflict.

For a short time an effort was made by the Faith Movement of the German Christians to bring about a compromise between these irreconcilable opposites, the Nazi and Christian totalitarian claim. But the question at issue was completely misunderstood when it proposed this unexemplified self-delusion: 'An unreserved attitude to the Gospel on the one hand and an equally unreserved attitude to the German nation on the other involves no contradiction.' We have this other statement, 'The Nazi Revolution has instilled into the German people a feeling of unity which equally justifies both faith *and* nationality.' In this Nazi doctrine of 'Blood and Soil,' there is set forth an idea of the creation of human life which, people are taught, provides an unchallengeable basis—a basis approved by God and from which Nazi-ism and Christianity appear to be, if not actually one, then two sides of one and the same thing.

This fantastic notion has given rise to extremely grave events since the moment when the 'German Christians,' encouraged by the State, took affairs into their own hands within German Protestantism. We say 'German Protestantism' for the German Evangelical Church was never with them. Everyone knows that thousands of punishments have been inflicted by the German-Christian Bishop, Ludwig Müller, and his supporters on those clergymen who, by reason of their faith, could not recognize this German Christian synthesis of Nazi-ism and Christianity. Equally well known is the perpetual unrest in South Germany, the repeated use of S.A.'s and secret police and the numerous press restrictions and confiscations. The great synods of Barmen, Dahlem and Berlin have given

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emphatic expression to the Church's opposition to the oppression exercised by this political heresy.

The 'German Christian Movement' has, on the one hand, ended in the declaration of a schism between 'German Protestantism' and the Evangelical Church, and, on the other hand, in the creation of a German-Christian sect, led by the so-called *Reichsbischof* who repudiates all other religious authority.

It is necessary here to point out the anomaly that the State, in spite of the great support it has given to the 'German Christians' as the pillars of the State Church, has nevertheless continued to assert its absolute neutrality in Church disputes. Moreover, the verdict of the public courts has always been favourable to the Confessional Church 'opposition,' and this has made her fight considerably easier.

Up to the end of 1934, the Nazi totalitarian doctrine was not so ceaselessly upheld as is sometimes imagined. The wider 'German Faith Movement,' however, has come more and more to the front during 1935, and the attitude of the State towards it has shown more clearly its acceptance of the complete totalitarian claim.

What is this 'German Faith Movement'? The report of the Prussian Synod* to the congregations thus characterizes it, 'In this movement the racial-national *Weltanschauung* becomes a *mythus*. Blood and race, nationality, honour and freedom become idols. The new faith in an "eternal Germany" which this new "religion" puts forward replaces the belief in the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'

Just as the 'German Christians' are the organized power *within* the 'Church,' desiring to help the Nazi totalitarian claim at the expense of God's Word, so the 'German Faith Movement' seeks the same thing *outside* the Church in clear and open contradiction to the Christian confession. This is, at any rate, decidedly cleaner and more honest.

* 5th March, 1935.

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From the beginning, the idea of having two divine revelations within the Church, the Holy Scriptures and the 'Call of the Blood' was abandoned. It was, therefore, declared quite clearly that divinity for Germans can only be found, if at all, in the German man (creature). The absolutely 'foreign' Christian revelation, foreign because originating with the Jews, is emphatically rejected.

This conception of the eternity and religious importance of the German man serves to explain the origin of the idea of the State as the highest earthly power. The meaning and purpose of the State is quite definitely to guarantee the maintenance and furtherance of the German man, German blood and German soil. But, in order to do justice to this task in all aspects of German life, the most extraordinary authority is needed—totalitarian.

Since, on the other hand, the present State, or more exactly, the present leader, visibly represents the embodiment of this idea of the State as well as of the German man, the most audacious identification becomes possible. 'Hitler is Germany and Germany is Hitler,' said Rudolf Hess at the *Reichsparteitag* at Nürnberg in 1934. 'We have a tremendous faith in the thing that we ourselves are,' said the Youth Leader, Baldur von Schirach, at the Youth Festival in 1935.

This is the reason why the most daring imprisonments have taken place in Thuringia where Hitler is often spoken of and written about as the 'Saviour of the Germans,' the re-appeared Christ. If, therefore, the supreme purpose of the State is to serve the 'external German' man (in Nazi language: blood, soil, race, nationality), and that man finds his visible representative in the State, then it is easy to see how strongly opposed that kind of complete autonomy is to the idea of the Apostle that the ruler is 'the minister of God.*' By this conception of the German man, the State ministers to no one but itself and knows no higher authority than that which it bears in itself.

The State has not thus far spoken so precisely and

* Romans 13: 4.

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unequivocally about itself—especially when addressing the churches. For the present it is the 'German Faith Movement' which declares this doctrine quite undisguisedly. Accordingly, in the message already mentioned, the Prussian Synod has expressed itself thus: 'Obediently and gratefully the Church recognizes the authority of the State as founded on and limited by the Word of God, and, therefore, she cannot accept the grave totalitarian claim which the *New Religion* attributes to the State.'

The State, however, tried to prevent the reading of this message by arresting 500 Prussian clergymen and sentencing 400 more to detention in their own homes. These measures, however, were very soon withdrawn and the message was eventually read without hindrance. Thus, the State continues to hesitate to insist on the avowal which it had made when it first intervened in favour of the 'German Faith Movement.' Its action may be said to be illogical, but an irreconcilable clash was avoided.

The fact has been emphasized that the State in its declarations and attitude towards the Church has always shown a certain understanding that its totalitarian claim must retreat, so to speak, before the Church walls, without capturing them. Nevertheless, it has become clear that the State will not allow these walls to check the progress of its totalitarian claim. The position of the State is, therefore, self-contradictory.

It was, therefore, of supreme importance to discover whether the State, in view of its attitude, was prepared to recognize the *true* totalitarian claim of the Word of God, a claim exceeding all other claims and one which the Church must unflinchingly declare.

The purpose of Professor Barth's refusal to swear the oath was to make this clear. He refused to swear allegiance to one whose authority was unrestricted by any higher power, and asked to be allowed to add the words, 'So far as I, as an evangelical Christian, can.' By this he wished to make quite clear that 'the duty to the leader, Adolf Hitler, could only have, for the evangelical Christian, a meaning fundamentally subject to God's Word.' The

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State replied to this request by temporarily suspending him from office, but later changed this to dismissal.

During this period the Confessional Church had adopted an attitude towards taking the oath similar to that of Professor Barth, and this made it possible for him to offer to take the oath without insisting on personal reservations, seeing that the Church had stated what *it* understood to be involved in taking the oath.

It is noteworthy that all the Roman Catholic officials in the Empire had been enabled to swear the oath in its appointed form because their Church declared publicly what it understood the oath to mean for its members. It had not been easy for the Confessional Church to define its attitude in this matter as this could only be one opposed to the State. But, as has been seen, the 'temporary management' of the German Evangelical Church did make clear, while rejecting all 'political' reflections, what it considered to be the Christian interpretation of the oath.

The declaration of the Union of Reformed Congregations of Germany, however, took up the challenge of Professor Barth's action much more decisively when it informed the Minister of Education that 'the decision of every single evangelical Christian in Germany, through their allegiance to God's Word, cannot be other than that which was reached by Professor D. Karl Barth.' So, too, the Prussian Synod in March, adopted the same standpoint while Professor Barth's appeal was still unanswered. It declared, 'The oath finds its limitation in the fact that God's Word alone binds us unconditionally.'

On the 15th June, the Court of Appeal, without considering the religious background of the case, decided to impose a fine as a suitable punishment for Barth's unruly attitude, and cancelled his dismissal. The question may be asked as to whether there was here a recognition of the Christian totalitarian claim, a respect for the Apostle's rule, 'We ought to obey God rather than man.'* Not at all! A German supreme court had once again administered justice.

* Acts 5 : 29.

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That was all. But the real decision had not yet been reached.

This was given in the decree of the Minister of Education on 22nd June, which declared that in spite of the favourable result of his appeal, Professor Barth must be placed on the retired list as he was not in a position to fulfil the first requirement expected of every State official to be 'at all times and in all circumstances responsible to the Leader and to the State.' It was said to be a matter of indifference whether a person took offence from religious or other motives: indifference! that was just the point that had to be cleared up. It had now become plain that the State, after putting aside all other authority, even that of the law—was not willing to grant exception to the authority of the Word of God. The 'German News Bureau' tries to gloss this over by stating, 'Barth's religious convictions have had no influence on the minister's decision.' 'Exactly,' the Church ought to have answered, for that is just what she cannot tolerate, that a protest founded on God's Word should be treated like any other 'general view-point.' But will the Church say that? She could have said it very clearly by herself offering Professor Barth an office. Owing to a regrettable lack of understanding and to the indecision of the 'temporary Church Management' this was not done, and Professor Barth meanwhile accepted a Chair in Basel University. This was the last great service which he could render to the German Evangelical Church. He staked his whole position, not only by his word, but by his acts in making clear to her the situation in which she finds herself in the conflict of rival totalitarian claims, now, more than ever, irreconcilable.

The inevitable clash has now taken place in Germany. Dr. Kerrl has ordered the suspension of all publicity of opinions and activities of the Confessional Church and proposes to deprive it of all legal rights within the German Evangelical Church. The 'new' religion which repudiates the Christian faith has now a clear field, and the evangelical faith will have to fight for its very existence.—EDITOR.